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NOTES AND LITERATURE

DARWINISM AND HUMAN LIFE

PROFESSOR JAMES ARTHUR THOMSON'S recent¹ book under the title of "Darwinism and Human Life" is most attractive reading. Professor Thomson thinks independently and writes fascinatingly. He gives even the most familiar of subjects new color and atmosphere.

The matter of the book was given in 1909 as the "South African Lectures," whose "chief aim was to explain the gist of Darwinism." An endeavor was made to add to the necessarily general and somewhat familiar content of the lectures, suggestions of how "Darwinism touches every-day life, in farm and garden, in city and empire."

The Darwinian reader interested by this prospect of finding his old wine put into new bottles runs rapidly through the chapters with the familiar headings of What we owe to Darwin, The Web of Life, The Struggle for Existence, The Raw Materials of Progress, Facts of Inheritance and Selection: Organic and Social, nosing for Darwinism and Human Life. And he finds himself rather disappointed at first, for he does not discover as much of the practical interlocking of Darwinism and human affairs as perhaps he felt justified in expecting. But in the last chapter he does find it more obviously and in more abundance than elsewhere and he begins really to read. And lo, when he stops reading he finds that he has read the book, all of it, backwards! And is very glad he has. At any rate, all this is what I did.

Professor Thomson is a good selectionist; though not a bad one; that is, not one who has an all other possible evolution factors—phobia. However, Darwinism for him rests on, or is, mostly selection. And it is the possible play of selection in human life, its play among individuals, among societies and among races, on which most of his direct application of evolution knowledge to human affair rests. Hence organic selection, social selection, eugenics, selection of Utopias, reversed human

¹ Thomson, J. A., "Darwinism and Human Life," 245 pp., frontispiece (Charles Darwin), 1910, H. Holt & Co., New York.

selection, and the like, are the subjects of his more concrete "Darwinism and Human Life" paragraphs. But Professor Thomson recognizes the broader aspect of his subject. He sees that all of Darwinism, in its very broadest sense, has interrelation with all of human doing and becoming. And it is this recognition, and the constant suggestion of it, everywhere in his discussion of the familiar subjects of the "gist of Darwinism," that make even the practised Darwinian reader read with fresh interest the whole of the book; even if he does happen, as your reviewer did, to do it backward!

V. L. K.

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